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## CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD



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CHRB NEWS RELEASE

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## DR. JEFF BLEA BECOMES NEW EQUINE MEDICAL DIRECTOR

SACRAMENTO -- Dr. Jeff Blea will assume the responsibilities of Equine Medical Director for the California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) on July 1, replacing Dr. Rick Arthur, who retires June 30 after serving 15 years as EMD.

In addition to advising the Board on matters pertaining to equine health and welfare, Dr. Blea will help oversee the CHRB's drug testing program, work with investigators on medication violations, liaise with those peers directing programs at the University of California, Davis, including the Postmortem Program, and work with Official Veterinarians in their oversight of practicing veterinarians.

Dr. Blea is perfectly positioned to assume this vital role. He was a practicing veterinarian on the Southern California thoroughbred circuit for 28 years, and during that time he demonstrated an interest in improving horse racing, focusing primarily on equine health and welfare, as evidenced by his leadership nationally with the American Association of Equine Practitioners and regionally with the Southern California Equine Foundation. He served as a director of the Dolly Green Research Foundation from 1999 to 2015. The list of the organizations and programs he has served is long and admirable.

Originally Dr. Blea hoped to be a jockey, but an accident cut short that career, which led him into veterinary medicine.

"As it turned out, I consider myself a better vet than I would have been a rider," he said pragmatically. "I studied at Colorado State University. While there, I met people who were interested in organized veterinary medicine. I was mentored by some incredible people who were progressive, not only in what veterinary medicine should be but also in what horse racing should be.

"When I came to California, I met Dr. Arthur and it really opened my eyes relative to the horse racing industry and the role of veterinary medicine. This led to a greater understanding of what the racing industry was and what it should be...where it needed to be. I realized I could take my

practical background and blend it with my scientific knowledge to make a greater impact on improving care of the horse in particular and improving horse racing in general.

“When Rick announced his pending retirement a few years ago, he urged me to apply,” Dr. Blea continued. “Others did as well. Initially I resisted. I was quite happy practicing veterinary medicine. Mostly out of curiosity I applied. During the long interview process, I began to realize that the role of EMD was much more than I had appreciated. This led to a greater understanding of the significance of the EMD, and so by the end of the process I realized this job was something I wanted to do if offered the opportunity.”

Dr. Blea was chosen from a strong field of well-qualified applicants. The EMD position they all sought is significantly different than the one Dr. Arthur found when he accepted the job 15 years ago. Dr. Arthur directed more centralized oversight in a number of areas under the general responsibility of the EMD.

CHRB Chairman Greg Ferraro said during the June meeting, ““During the last 15 years, Dr. Arthur has brought our medical program and our health and safety program light-years ahead of where it was when he started. We truly appreciate what you’ve done.”

Dr. Arthur expressed full confidence in his replacement. “I know Dr. Blea very well,” said Dr. Arthur. “He understands the challenges going forward and has the background, knowledge, and tenacity to do the job.”

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